

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 SANA 05151 310847Z
ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION USUN NXL YORK

S E C R E T SANA 5151

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, YE, SA, US, SO
SUBJECT: POLITICAL MILITARY SITUATION IN HORN

REFERENCE: (A) SANA &600; (B) JIDDA 8794 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: WE CANNOT ADD FIRM INFORMATION FROM YEMEN OF REPORTS
IN JIDDA CABLE THAT SAUDIS MAY BE BUILDING UP THEIR FORCES ON
NORTHERN BORDER OF PDRY IN ORDER TO MOUND "FIRST STRIKE" AGAINST
COMMUNIFT COUP THERE OR TO INTERVENE IN FAVOR OF MODERATE COUP.
THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INTRIGUING HINTS AND SOME MILITARY MOVEMENTS
HERE WHICH WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH SUCH A SAUDI PLAN BUT WE QUESTION
WHETHER YARG COULD OR WOULD DO MUCH TO SUPPORT SUADI WAR AGAINST
PDRY. IN ANY CASE, WHAT YARG DOES IS ONLY SMALL PART OF LARGER

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DRAMA WHICH MAY NOW BE UNFOLDING IN HORN, PITTING SAUDIS AGAINST
SOVIETS IN MILITARY AND POLITICAL CONTEST FOR PREDOMINANCE. THIS HAS
IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR POLICY OF REGIONAL COOPRATION.
END SUMMARY.

1. THERE IS NO RPT NO EVIDENCE HERE THAT SAUDIS EXPECT AC OUP IN
PDRY. SAUDIS INSANA WHO MIGHT BE IN KNOW ON MATTER -- CHIEFLY

MILITARY

ATTACHE SALIH HUDDAYAN-- SAY EVERYTHING IS QUIET. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THEY DENY ANY KNOWLEDGE OF SAUDI BUILD-UP IN SHARURA, ALTHOUGH THEY ADMIT THAT SEVERAL HUNDRED SOLDIERS FROM JAYSH AL AWDA("ARMY OF THE RETURN," MAJOR UNIT IN SOUTHERN EXILE FORCES WHICH SAUDIS CREATED IN 1971 FOR FIGHT AGAINST PDRY) HAVE BEEN ROUNDED UP BY YARG AND RETURNED TO BASES IN NAJRAN AND EASTERN DESERT. SAUDIS ALSO DON'T DENY THAT GROUP FROM THESE FORCES MADE RAID INTO PDRY LAST MONTH.

2. WHEN AMBASSADOR RAISED QUESTION OF SAUDI BUILD-UP IN EASTERN DESERT

WITH YAR PRESIDENT GHASHMI IN LATE NOVEMBER, HE GOT UNCHARACTERISTICALLY EVASIVE REPLY/ "WHY DON'T YOU ASK THE SAUDIS?" IMPRESSION RPT IMPRESSION OF BOTH AMBASSADOR AND DCM, WHO PRESENT AT MEETING, WAS THAT GHASHMI KNEW OR SUSPECTED MUCH MORE THAN HE WILLING TO DISCUSS. AMBASSADOR PRESSED ABOUT SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES OF PDRY CADRES OR SYMPATHIZERS IN SOUTH OF YAR--SPECIFICALLY IN TINDERBOX AREA NORTH OF BEYDA UP ROAD TO DHAMAR-- GHASHMI SAID GRIMLY THAT YARG WAS DOING NOTHING FOR MOMENT BUT WAS "WATCHING." AGAIN, IMPLICATION SEEMED TO BE THAT GHASHMI WAS PREPARED TAKE FORCEFUL ACTION IN AREA AGAINST LEFTISTS.

3. ONE PROBLEM WITH ANY SUCH INTENTION AT THAT TIME WAS THAT AREA WAS GARRISONED BY PARATROOPERS AND AMALIQA BRIGADE. FORMER UNIT BELONGS TO GHASHMI ANTAGONIST AND FELLOW MEMBER OF COMMAND COUNCIL, SECRET

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ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM AND LATTER BRIGADE BELONGED TO ABDALLAH AL-HAMDI, BROTHER WHO SLAIN ALONG WITH PRESIDENT. THIS WEEK, HOWEVER, EMBASSY HAS BEEN INFORMED THAT CONTINUING COMPLAINTS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS HAVE LED GHASHMI TO PULL PARATROOPERS OUT OF SOUTHERN AREAS. THIS HAS ANGERED ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM, BECAUSE COMPLAINTS DID NOT ALLEGE THAT PARATROOPERS FAILED TO PROTECT LOCAL POPULATION FROM TERRORISM BUT RATHER THAT THEY CARRIED OUT THE ACTS THEMSELVES. RIGHT WING IN SANA THUS ACCUSES ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM AS VIRTUAL AGENT OF IRAQIS, LIBYANS, AND PDRY.

4. WITH REMOVAL OF PARATROOPERS AND SUCCESS OF GHASHMI APPOINTEES IN AMALIQA IN STABILIZING SITUATION THERE, GHASHMI COULD HAVE FREER HANDS IN MOVING AGAINST LEFTISTS AND EVEN -- IF HE CHOSE-- IN OPPOSING PDRY FORCES ACROSS THE BORDER. HOWEVER, HE WOULD HAVE NO RPT NO AIR SUPPORT FROM SOVIET TRAINED AND SUPPORTED AIR FORCE IN SANA AND HODEIDA, AND WE DO NOT CREDIT YAR GROUND UNITS AS CAPABLE OF ATTACK AGAINST MORE DISCIPLINED, BETTER SUPPORTED, AND TRAINED SOUTHERN FORCES. YAR ARMY IS NOT COMPETENT TO REGISTER OR CONTROL INDIRECT FIRE, WHICH MEANS THAT HEAVY WEAPONS LIKE HOWITZERS CAN BE FIRED ONLY WHEN POINTED DIRECTLY AT TARGET, LIKE RIFLE. SOUTHERNERS CAN COUNT, IN ADDITION, ON DIRECT SUPPORT OF NUMEROUS CUBAN AND SOVIET ADVISORS AND UNITS ALREADY IN PDRY.

5. DESPITE THESE SHORTCOMINGS IN YAR MILITARY THERE HAVE BEEN SOME PDRY-YAR CLASHES ON BORDER REPORTED IN RECENT DAYS. DEPTUY CHIEF OF STAFF TOLD DATT THAT PDRY REACTION TO SAUDI BUILD-UP THREATENED YAR AS WELL AS SAG. WE HAVE OTHER REPORTS OF CLASH AT HARIB AND AT BAYDA. DETAILS AND CONFIRMATION OF THESE REPORTS ARE LACKING AT MOMENT.

6. WE HAVE ALSO SOME OTHER INCONCLUSIVE BUT INTERESTING INDICATIONS THAT BASH COULD BE IN OFFING. FORMIN ASNAJ TOLD AMBASSADOR ON NOVEMBER 28 THAT IF SAUDIS AND OMANIS MOVE AGAINST PDRY WE (YAR) WOULD WANT TO FOLLOW TO GET BACK OUR "HISTORIC" LANDS IN SOUTH.

7. IN EVALUATING REPORTS LIKE JIDDA REFTEL, THEREFORE, THERE IS NOT SECRET

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MUCH WE CAN ADD OF DETAIL FROM THIS POST. WISH TO TRY TO PUT REPORT IN LARGER CONTEXT, HOWEVER.

8. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT SAUDIS OR YAR WOULD TRY TO TURN BACK CLOCK TO 1971-73 PERIOD WHEN SO MUCH MONEY AND BLOOD WAS SHED TRYING TO TOPPLE PDRY. DAMAGE IN YAR WAS MUCH GREATER THAN IN SOUTH. SAG MAY THINK IT IS BETTER ORGANIZED AND STRONGER NOW IN MILITARY ARENA, BUT SO IS PDRY AND THEY HAVE HEAVY BACKING FROM USSR, SAUDIS CERTAINLY DON'T SEEM TO HAVE OUR SUPPORT FOR DIRECT ACTION AGAINST SOVIETS AND RADICALS IN SOUTH ARABIA. THUS, BOTH PAST FAILURES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS SEEM TO ARGUE AGAINST RENEWED WAR HERE. MOREOVER, COMMITTING SAUDI MILITARY FORCES OUTSIDE KINGDOM IS POLITICAL RISK TO MONARCHY.

9. ON OTHER HAND, AS WE REPORTED IN SANA REFTEL, THERE IS CLEARLY VERY AMBITIOUS SAUDI PLAN TO RE-DRAW MAP IN HORN OF AFRICA AND REORIENT POLITICS HERE. WE DON'T FORECLOSE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION WITH IRAN AND OMAN TO DETACH HADRAMAUT FROM PDRY, GIVING SAUDIS PIPELINE ACCESS TO INDIAN OCEAN, AND TOPPING RADICAL REGIME IN ADEN. WHETHER SAUDIS WANT SEE AS PART OF THIS KIND OF DEAL SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN PARTS OF YEMEN UNITED IS HARDER TO SAY. WE GUESS NOT, BUT AS PART OF PLAN WHEREBY SOVIETS ARE EXPELLED FROM PENINSULA AND FRIENDLY REGIME INSTALLED IN ADEN, IT IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE. SAUDI PLANS FOR WESTERN SHORE OF LOWER END OF RED SEA SEEM EVEN PLAINER: WREST ERITREA AWAY FROM ETHIOPIA, SUPPORT SOMALI SEIZURE OF OGADEN AND, PERHAPS, IN TIME, SOMALI ABSORPTION OF UNSTABLE AND WEAK DJIBOUTI. IF SOVIETS REMAIN IN ETHIOPIA THEY WILL BE TIED TO LANDLOCKED, DEFEATED, UNPOPULAR REGIME BUT CHANCES ARE THAT REGIME WILL CRUMBLE AND SOVIETS WILL BE UNABLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITION THERE. IN EITHER CASE, SAUDIS WILL NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ISRAELI PRESENCE IN SOUTHERN END OF RED SEA.

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10. FACT SEEMS TO BE THAT SOVIETS HAVE TAKEN UP GUANTLET IN ETHIOPIA AND MAY WELL PUCH TO DEFEAT AND PUNISH SOMALIS AND FRUSTRATE EFFORTS OF EGYPTIANS, PERHAPS FRENCH, SAUDIS, IRANIANS AND OHTERS TO DRIVE TSEM OUT OF HORN. THUS SAUDI-SOVIET ISSUE MAY HAVE MILITARY DECISION. IT'S NOT HARD TO GUESS HOW THAT WILL COME OUT.

11. WE CONTINUE TO WONDER IF IT MAKES SENSE FOR US TO SIT ON SIDELINES S OF THIS FRAY. OUR STATEMENTS ACCUSING SOVIETS AND CUBANS OF INTERVENTION DON'T SEEM TO BE HAVING DESIRED EFFECT. SAUDIS AND SOMALIS MAY HAVE OVERREACHED THEMSELVES, BUT SHOULD WE LET SOVIETS ADMINISTER A BEATING? CAN WE INFLUENCE OUR FRIENDS WHILE THEY SEE US DOING LITTLE MORE THAN ADMONISHING THEM?

12. WE DEFER TO OTHERS ON HOW TO RAISE SUCH QUESTIONS, BUT GIVEN OUR DEEP INTEREST IN SAUDI COOPERATION IN VARIETY OF ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC ENTERPRISES, BELIEVE WE SHOULD PRESS INQUIRY INTO SAUDI AIMS AND DESIRES IN HORN. THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND DEGREE OF OUR SUPPORT AND RIASKS OF BEING DRAWN INTO MILITARY CONFLICT WITH SOVIETS IN PLACES LIKE PDYR BEFORE MATTERS REACH SOME SORT OF CRISIS AND CERTAINLY BEFORE SITUATION IN NORTH YEMEN HAS STABILIZED. SCOTES

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